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The FBI's 'secret army of terrorists'

Examiner News Services

SAN DIEGO — The FBI created and financed an ultraright-wing vigilante group called the Secret Army Organization to prey on dissidents in the early 1970s, it was reported here yesterday.

The San Diego Union described the SAO as a "centrally designed and externally financed infrastructure designed for terror and sabotage."

These acts, it said, were sanctioned by the FBI.

The article said the SAO venture developed from J. Edgar Hoover's "Cointelpro" intelligence effort that ultimately focused on black nationalist and new left groups.

Between 1971 and 1972, the SAO "waged protracted guerrilla warfare against antiwar protestors in San Diego," the Union said.

The group, whose members were heavily armed with automatic weapons and explosives, burglarized the homes and of Vietnam war protesters, bombed and ransacked activist offices, including a local underground newspaper, and firebombed cars, the newspaper said.

They also made death threats against local dissidents and political figures, plotted to kidnap certain radicals and shot a young San Diego woman.

Comment from the FBI was not immediately available.

But the union quoted FBI Director Clarence Kelley's testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee Dec. 10.

"What I said in 1974 and what I believe today, is that FBI employes involved in these ('Cointelpro') programs did what they felt was expected of them by the President, attorney general, the Congress and the people of the United States."

The Union also says that the SAO, founded after the right-wing Minutemen group was forced to disband in 1969, drew up battle plans to disrupt demonstrations at the 1972 Republican National Convention, then scheduled for San Diego.

The Union identified the key SAO leader as Howard Berry Godfrey. It was he, the paper said, who paid the expenses of the secret army, recruited new members, supplied the explosives and picked out targets.

He also was a paid FBI informant, the story said.

Quoting grand jury testimony from July 1972, the story said Godfrey testified that he helped found the Secret Army Organization on orders from the FBI. The bureau then used the right-wing extremists to terrorize local radicals.

While he led the group, Godfrey testified he was in constant touch with his FBI supervisor, Special Agent Steve Christensen, making daily reports on his activities.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, which has been investigating the FBI's secret campaign against dissident groups, has studied a report from the American Civil Liberties Union claiming that the bureau initiated death plots against San Diego leftists.